

## A note on the Rigvedic phrase “Apam Napat (अपां नपात)”

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Most of the Vedicists generally term Rigvedic phrase ‘**Apam Napat (अपां नपात)**’ as the title of honour given to God **Agni** and not the proper name of the **Fire God**. The Sanskrit phrase is commonly translated by many as “the **Child of the Waters** or the **Son of the Waters**”.

In **Rigved**, two hymns belonging to two different Mandalas are commonly treated as dedicated to **Apam Napat**; and they are identified as the **Rv-2.35** (the Earliest Mandala) and **Rv-10.30** (the Last Mandala of **Rigved**). Additionally, information found in the hymn **Rv-10.51** that relates God **Agni** to **Apa/waters** and **Plants** is taken up for discussion. Therefore, this note is mainly based on the information drawn from the afore-stated three hymns [1, 2].

Apart from the two devoted hymns **Rv-2.35** and **Rv-10.30**, the term **Apam Napat** is also found in some Rigvedic verses; **RV-1.186,5**; **RV-3.9,1**; **Rv-5,41,10**; **RV-6.52,14**; **Rv-7.34,15**; **Rv-7.35,13**; **Rv-10.8,5**; **Rv-10.92,13**; **Rv-10.149,2** etc.

Moreover, the Poets in some hymns have described the title **Apam Napat** possesses more than **one expression** or **identity**. Hence in the following paragraphs, one-by-one, we shall try to know the different facets of **Apam Napat** brought out by the Rigvedic Composers.

### I. ‘Apam Napat’ as ‘the Child of the Waters’:

Many Vedic Scholars believe that the term **Apam Napat** would have been coined by the pre-Rigvedic Rishis after observing the **setting** of the **Sun** in the large water body. Following verses selected for the discussion link **Apam Napat** with the streams/waters/sea.

**Rv-2.35,3**: *samanyā yantyupa yantyanyāḥ samānamūrvaṃ nadyaḥ prṇanti /*

*tamū śuciṃ śucayo dīdivāṃsamapāṃ napātāṃ pari tasthurāpaḥ //*

समन्या यन्त्युपं यन्त्यन्याः समानमूर्वं नद्यः पृणन्ति । तमूशुचिंशुचयोदीदिवामसम्पां नपातंपरि तस्थुरापः ॥

**Interpretation:** Some (small streams) flow together, and some (big streams) flow independently and then join the sea in the form of the rivers. Here the bright or pure (शुचि) waters have surrounded the shining (दीदिव) **child of waters**.

In Mandala-10 verse **Rv-10.30,3** as well, the Poet has purposely linked **Apam Napat** with the **Sea**.

**Rv-10.30,3:** *adhvaryavo.apa itā samudramapāṃ napātāṃ haviṣā yajadhvam |*  
*sa vo dadadūrmimadyā supūtaṃ tasmai somaṃ madhumantaṃsunota ||*

अध्वर्यवो.अप इता समुद्रमपां नपातं हविषा यजध्वम |स वो दददूर्मिमद्या सुपूतं तस्मै सोमं मधुमन्तंसुनोत ||

**Interpretation:** The Poet requests **Adhvaryus** go to the **Sea** and worship the **child of waters** and give oblation there. After worship, **Apam Napat** would send a well clarified gift (in the form of wave or rains?) to you. Then **Adhvaryus** need to press **sweet Soma** for **him**.

### **Discussion on the contents of verses Rv-2.35,3 and Rv-10.30,3**

From the content of above two verses, it is crystal clear that **Apam Napat** is closely associated with the **Sea** as it acts as the reservoir for in-coming water from *many streams/rivers* as well as rain-water, means the **Sea** receives water from several sources. Probably, that is why the phrase, **Apam Napat** is generally translated as the **Child of the Waters (plural)**.

In the second line of verse **Rv-2.35,3**; the Poet has described the **shinning child of waters** is **encircled by bright water** means the said description definitely implies the **setting of the Sun**. This has been shown in **Figure-1a**.



**Figure 1a: Sunset in a Sea**



**1b: View of Sunset from a river Bank**

When the Sunset is seen from the sea shore, then due to a very large size of the **sea**, one cannot view opposite shore/land. Now, taking into consideration the geography of Rigvedic Territory, only the southernmost part of the **Harappan Civilization** such as present-day Gujarat coast or Sindh / Baluchistan coastline can meet the criterion of viewing the **Sunset** in the **Sea** which is the infinite storehouse of waters.

When the **Sunset** is viewed from an eastern bank of a river that flows from North to south direction like river **Sindhu**, then as the viewer can see opposite bank of the river and the

landmass or mountain too (see **Figure-2b**), then the description of the **bright water surrounding the Child of Waters** becomes irrelevant as it does not meet the requirement of the condition of verse **Rv-2.35,3** as the **Sun is not surrounded by the waters from all sides**.

Therefore, as described in the verses **Rv-2.35,3** and **Rv-10.30,3**; the term **Apam Napat** or the **Child of Waters** is applicable to the **Sun when it sets** in a very large water body like the **Sea** only as its other end is not visible (the Sun is surrounded by water from all directions). Such Sunset can be experienced either from a shore or while performing journey in a **Sea**.

In other words, the daily rise and disappearance of the **Sun in the sea waters** was viewed by the Vedic People as the regular arrival and then hiding of **Agni/fire God in waters**.

**Note:** Some **Bookish Vedists** often assert that the **Vedic Priests** did not know the **Sea** as they moved from the **Central Asia** to the **Indus Valley** via ancient **Persia**. However, after understanding the logic behind the creation of phrase **Apam Napat**, it becomes apparent that the **pre-Rigvedic Rishis** who introduced the concept of **Apam Napat** were fully aware of the proper **Sea/Samudra**.

## II. ‘Apam Napat’ takes the form of the ‘Lightning’:

Please take a close look at the verse **Rv-2.35.9** as the Poet of the said verse has spoken about a different form of ‘**Apam Napat**’ [1, 2].

**RV-2.35,9:** *apām napādā hyasthādupastham jihmānāmūrdhvo vidyutam vasānaḥ |*  
*tasya jyeṣṭham mahimānaḥ vahantīrhiranyavarṇāḥ pari yanti yāhvīḥ ||*

अपां नपादा ह्यस्थादुपस्थं जिह्मानामूर्ध्वो विद्युतं वसानः । तस्य ज्येष्ठं महिमानुवहन्तीरिःरिण्यवर्णाः परि यन्ति यावही ॥

**Interpretation:** The **Child of Waters** has moved upwards but robed in the form of **Lightning** (**विद्युतं वसानः**). The golden coloured senior (**ज्येष्ठं**) but heavenly (**यह्वीः**) maidens go around him.

### Discussion on the verse Rv-2.35,9

In the afore-mentioned verse, the Composer identifies the **Lightning** that appears in the sky when the rain clouds come together as a new form of ‘**Apam Napat**’. It means to say that the **Child of Waters** from the sea goes upward and now takes the shape of **lightning**, indirectly tells us that the energy hidden in **waters** gets transforms into visible **Fire bolt** or **Flashlight**.

Figures 2a and 2b depict the appearance of Lightning in the sky due to rain clouds.



Fig.2a: Burst of Light seen in the sky.



Fig.2b: Lightning encircled with red-yellow Flare.

### III. What is the relation between Grita/Ghee and ‘Apam Napat’?

The **Mandala-2** Poet in the hymn addressed to ‘**Apam Napat**’ has clearly spoken about its connection with **Grita/Ghee** used in **Yajna ritual**. Verse **Rv-2.35,11** provides information on the same [1, 2].

**RV-2.35,11:** *tadasyānīkamuta cāru nāmāpīcyam vardhate napturapām |*

*yamindhate yuvatayah samitthā hiraṇyavarṇam ghṛtamannamasya //*

तदस्यानीकमुत चारुनामापीच्यं वर्धतेनप्तुरपाम् । यमिन्धते युवतयःसमित्था हिरण्यवर्णं घृतमन्नमस्य ॥

**Interpretation:** The splendour or beautiful appearance of the **Child of Waters** grows further when young women (**युवतयः**) come together to light him. Golden colour **Grita/Ghee** is his food.

#### Discussion on the verse Rv-2.35,11

As in the above verse, the Poet has made it clear that **Apam Napat** is also created by **young women/युवतयः** using **Grita/Ghee**, then it can be said that the character is definitely in the form of a **lamp** or **household Agni**. This is because, in those day, in every house food was cooked by burning firewood and particularly in the night, in every house the illumination or light was obtained by kindling earthen lamps using Ghee as a fuel. Surprisingly, in the entire text, there is no mention of word **Deep**/lamp. But a mention of *hiraṇyavarṇam ghṛta/ हिरण्यवर्णं घृतम* in the said verse makes us to believe that the Poet is taking about use of **Golden colour**

**Ghee** to produce ‘**Apam Napat**’/ the Child of Waters (a form of Agni). Figure-3a exhibits golden colour Cow Grita/Ghee in a glass bowl and 3b depicts a Ghee Lamp that produces light.



**Fig.3a:** Golden colour Cow Ghee.

**Fig.3b:** An earthen lamp uses ghee to produce light.

Additionally, the Poet in the verse **Rv-2.35,10** has informed us about the **golden appearance** of **Apam Napat**, most likely due to **his** consumption of **golden food**. Also in the **verse-4** of the said hymn, the Composer has highlighted presence of the waters (**molten Grita/Ghee** looks like **water**) around the youthful (Agni) as shown in **Fig,-3b**. It means to say that when the Poet says that **Young Women** are engaged in fashioning of ‘**Apam Napat**’, then surely, it has to be a household activity, could be the kindling of **firewood for cooking purpose** or **lighting a Ghee Lamp** done daily in the evening by the young girls/women of that era.

**Rv-2.35,10:** *hiranyarūpaḥ sa hiranyasandṛghapām napāt sedu hiraṇyavarṇaḥ /*  
*hiranyayāt pari yonerniṣadyā hiranyadā dadatyannamasmai ||*

हिरण्यरूपः स हिरण्यसंदृगपां नपात्सेदु हिरण्यवर्णः । हिरण्ययात्परियोर्नेर्निषद्या हिरण्यदा ददत्यन्नमस्मै ॥

**Rv-2.35,4:** *taṃmerā yuvatayo yuvānaṃ marmījyamānāḥ pari yantyāpaḥ /*  
*sa śukrebhiḥ śikvabhī revadasme dīdāyānidhmo ghṛtanirṇighapsu //*

तमस्मेरा युवतययुवानं मर्मृज्यमानाः परि युन्त्यापः । स शुक्रेभिः शिक्वभी रेवदस्मेदीदायानिधोघृतनिर्णिगप्सु ॥

Please note that since inception of the **Yajna** ritual, **Grita/ghee** is one of the main ingredients used to initiate and increase the intensity of the divine fire, but the rite was generally performed by several **Men/ Priests** in an open place and not exclusively by the **Young Women**. In the verse **Rv-2.35,5**; there is a mention of **Three Women Goddesses** wish to give **him food**.

In **Rigved**, there are two references that implicitly indicate use of **Grita/Ghee** in **Yajna** worship is due to **Ila**, the **pre-Rigvedic Queen** who had patronized the **Early Vedic Philosophy** including the Simple or **Pure Agni Worship**.

The **Mandala-7** Poet in the verse **Rv-7.16,8** has described the copious use of **Grita** in Yajna as *ilā ghṛtahastā/ इळां घृतहस्ता*. However, the Last Mandala Poet in the verse of **Apri Suktal, Rv-10.70,8** has recalled her as *ilā devī ghṛtapadī / इळां देवी घृतपदी*. It means to say that although the Royal Queen **Ila** lived during the pre-Rigvedic period, still she is remembered by the different generations of Rigvedic Poets due to her vital contribution that culminated in the fashioning of proper **Yajna** procedure wherein **Ghee** served as the food of God **Agni**.

#### IV. Soma offering to ‘Apam Napat’:

The Composer of the hymn **Rv-10.30** has clearly designated the **Sun** as **Apam Napat/ the Child of Waters**. As a part of **Yajna** ritual, in the **second verse** of the hymn, the **Adhvaryu Priests** are asked to go to **waters** and offer **Soma** to the character **Suparna** (सुपर्ण) which is nothing but the **Sun** as **Surya** moves in the mid-space/sky like a **large bird** [1, 2].

**Rv-10.30,2:** *adhvaryavo haviṣmanto hi bhūtāchāpa itośatīruśantaḥ /  
ava yāścaṣṭe aruṇaḥ suparṇastamāsyadhvamūrmimadyā suhastāḥ //*

अध्वर्यवो हविष्मन्तो हि भूताच्छाप इतोशतीरुशन्तः । अरुणः सुपर्णस्तमास्यध्वमूर्मिमद्या सुहस्ताः ॥

In the **verse-3**; the Poet tells **Adhvaryus** who are involved in the rite, to go to **Sea** (*samudra*) and give oblation of **Soma** to ‘**Apam Napat**’ (similar to giving **Ardhya** /अर्घ्य in the form of water). Other than the **Sun/Surya** (*Suparna*), who else would be the **Child of Waters**?

**Rv-10.30,3:** *adhvaryavo.apa itā samudramapāṇ napātāṇ haviṣā yajadhvam |  
sa vo dadadūrmimadyā supūtaṇ tasmai somaṇ madhumantaṃsunota //*

अध्वर्यवोऽप इता समुद्रमुपां नपातं हविषा यजध्वम् । स वो दददूर्मिम दददूर्मि सुपूतं तस्मै सोमं मधुमन्तं सुनोत ॥

As **Soma** plant grows in the region that gets more rains, and hence through **verses 3** and **4**, the Poet directs the **Adhvaryu Priests** to worship **Apam Napat/the Sun** so as to receive more rains from the **Sea**. As per the verse **Rv-1.164,7**; the rain is caused by the **Sun/Surya**.

## V. Agni as ‘Apam Napat’ quietly resides inside the Plants/wood:

As **Agni of Yajna** is created by burning wood, and hence it is generally considered that earlier to kindling, **Agni** remains in the hidden state in the form of plants as long as it is not initiated. The verse **Rv-10.51,3** implicitly talks about presence of **Agni in Plants** [1, 2].

**Rv-10.51,3:** *aichāma tvā bahudhā jātavedaḥ praviṣṭamaghne apsvōṣadhīṣu /  
taṃ tvā yamo acikeccitrabhāno daśāntaruṣyādatirocamānam ||*

ऐच्छाम त्वा बहुधा जातवेदःप्रविष्टमग्नेअप्स्वोषधीषु। तं त्वा यमोअचिकेच्चित्रभानोदशान्तरुष्यादतिरोचमानम् ॥

**Interpretation:** The hymn **Rv-10.51** cryptically describes as if, the God **Agni** is complaining to other Vedic Gods that he is facing **serious identity crisis** as the people just use him as a vehicle to please other Gods by way of offerings to fulfil their wishes, but do not pay attention to **his needs**. In other words, as and when required, **Agni of Yajna** is being used as the goods carrier to attract attention of Other Gods and once the purpose is served, then he is left alone without bothering about his independent existence (like the present-day **use and throw** model).

In the above verse, on behalf of Other Gods, the Poet is telling **Agni** that he is the all knower God (**Jatavedas**) and as he is present in many places in different forms in waters and in plants (**अप्स्वोषधीषु** means **Agni** hides himself in waters and plants). But God **Yama** has empowered him in such a way that he can be easily identified by his luminosity from a long distance (ten steps/**daśāntaruṣ**). It means, **Agni** is known by his **Golden colour light/flames**.

Figure-4a



Figure-4b



**Fig.-4a** and **4b** indicate more or less golden colour of the dried logs/wood that matches with the colour of flame produced during the burning wood in a fire place.



**In sum**, after observing the setting of the **Sun** in the Sea of western part the **Harappan Civilization** for many days, the **pre-Rigvedic Rishis** would have arrived at the decision that in every morning, the **Sun** rises in the east direction from the infinite Waters/Sea, then does the regular work assigned to him, and dies out in the western Waters in the evening.

Probably, during the process of setting of the **Sun** in the evening, the pre-Rigvedic Rishis would have noticed that the **Fireball / Surya** gets cooler as it approaches the Waters/Sea. Finally, when the **Sun** disappears in the Waters/Sea, they would have believed that during the night, the **Sun god** goes to **his resting place**. Next day morning, when the **Sun** rises from the east, he begins his day with lower intensity, but regains his normal power as the God ascends the mid-space. In this way, they would have treated the **Sun** as the distinct form of **household Agni/ Fire** who daily arrives from the eastern Waters/Sea and vanishes in the western Waters/Sea in the evening. This belief would have led to coining of a new phrase '**Apam Napat**' specifically to identify the **Sun/Surya/suparna** with a new title or degree as the **Child/Offspring/Progeny of Waters that possesses the Golden Colour**.

After seeing the phenomenon of the **rise and fall of intensity** of the other features with time, subsequently, the phrase, '**Apam Napat**' would have been extended to similar characters of the land or sky that also cause the fluctuations in the **light and heat** very similar to behaviour of the **Sun**. Hence now, the phrase '**Apam Napat**' represents the multi-location origin of the **Golden Colour Agni/Fire** generated from the **energy sources that exhibit varied intensity** including waters, lightning, wood, Grita/Ghee etc.

In **Rigved**, '**Apam Napat**' phrase applied to these four distinct characteristic features may be taken as the special incarnations/avatars of **land-based Agni**. Probably, the **Golden Colour** is the common factor among these features.

Please remember that the pre-Rigvedic Rishis and the Rigvedic Poets were the **excellent observers of the Natural Phenomena or Processes**,

#### **References:**

1. "**Rig Veda**" (Bilingual), Translated by Ralph T. H. Griffith (1896) in PDF
2. **Monier-Williams Dictionary**.

**Note:** All images sourced from the Internet/public domain.